

**DOCUMENT RESUME**

02560 - [A1652632]

[Reimbursement for Househunting Trip]. B-188350. June 3, 1977. 3 pp.

Decision re: Collin R. Galloway; by Robert F. Keller, Deputy Comptroller General.

Issue Area: Personnel Management and Compensation: Compensation (305).

Contact: Office of the General Counsel: Civilian Personnel.

Budget Function: General Government: Central Personnel Management (205).

Organization Concerned: Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration.

Authority: 5 U.S.C. 5724a(a)(2). F.T.R. (PPHR 101-7), para. 2-4.3(c). B-182508 (1975). B-179449 (1973). B-185532 (1976).

Jandra L. Schwick, an Authorized Certifying Officer of the Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration, requested a determination as to whether a claim for reimbursement for the expense of a househunting trip may be authorized for payment. Reimbursement was not allowed without prior authorization. Advice to employee which resulted in his not requesting authorization did not constitute an administrative error allowing for retroactive correction. (Author/SC)

John Carter  
Civ. Pern.

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**DECISION**



**THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES**  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20548

**FILE:** B-188350

**DATE:** June 3, 1977

**MATTER OF:** Collin R. Galloway - Househunting trip

**DIGEST:** Employee who failed to request authorization for househunting trip because of advice that reimbursement for such expenses could be requested later may not be reimbursed for househunting trip performed without prior authorization. Administrative errors which may be retroactively corrected to change employee travel benefits are those which relate to failure to follow specific intent of authorizing official regarding prior authorization. Officials here could form no intent to authorize househunting expenses since trip was not requested by employee.

We have been requested by Ms. Sandra L. Schmick, an authorized certifying officer of the Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration (MESA), Department of the Interior, to determine whether the claim of Mr. Collin R. Galloway for reimbursement for the expense of a househunting trip was authorized for payment.

Mr. Galloway was transferred from Bellevue, Washington, to Spokane, Washington, effective July 1, 1976. On June 30, 1976, in preparation for the relocation, he executed an employment agreement and completed a personal transfer travel data form from which his travel authorization was to be prepared. During the period from July 2, 1976, to July 5, 1976, Mr. Galloway and his wife traveled to Spokane to seek new residence quarters. Mr. Galloway's travel authorization, issued and signed on July 15, 1976, did not authorize reimbursement for a househunting trip but did authorize up to 30 days temporary quarters subsistence expenses. Consistent with Mr. Galloway's request for an advance of funds, temporary quarters indicated on his travel data form. MESA officials suspended from Mr. Galloway's original travel claim the amount of \$278.25 claimed for his househunting trip because it was not authorized in his travel order. In his reclaim Mr. Galloway states that he did not request reimbursement for househunting expenses on his travel data form because he was advised by an official at the MESA Spokane office that they did not like to pay for temporary quarters and a househunting

B-188350

trip and that he could claim househunting expenses later if he did not use temporary quarters. Mr. Galloway contends, in effect, that this advice was an administrative error which may be corrected by retroactively authorizing reimbursement of his househunting expenses.

The travel of employees for the purpose of seeking new residence quarters at a new duty station is authorized under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 5724a(a)(2) (1970), implemented in part 2-4 of the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) (FPMR 101-7) (May 1973). FTR para. 2-4.3(c) provides in pertinent part:

"c. Authorization prior to trip. The trip for finding residence quarters shall not be made at Government expense unless a permanent change of station travel order has been issued which includes authorization for the round trip and mode of transportation and period of time allowed for the trip \* \* \*."

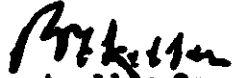
In certain cases we have allowed the payment of expenses for a househunting trip, notwithstanding the absence of prior written authorization, where the employee was verbally authorized by a responsible official of the agency with competent authority before the trip was made and the manner of the travel was in the best interest of the agency. However, in the absence of authorization prior to performance of the trip by an official vested with authority to grant such authorization, we have held that househunting trip expenses may not be reimbursed. B-182505, June 3, 1975.

The question here is whether the advice to Mr. Galloway which caused him not to request authorization of a househunting trip on his travel data form constitutes error of a type which may be construed as an exception to the regulatory requirement that the travel order include authorization for travel to seek residence quarters at the new duty station. In this particular context, administrative errors which may be retroactively corrected to increase or decrease the travel benefits allowed employees are those which relate to a failure to follow the specific intent of the authorizing official with respect to prior authorization. B-179449, November 26, 1973. There is no evidence that the individual who advised Mr. Galloway with respect to his completion of

B-186350

the travel data form had authority to authorize travel expenses. Thus it appears that MESA officials having such authority could form no specific intent with regard to Mr. Galloway's entitlement to a househunting trip at Government expense since they were not requested on the personnel travel data form to authorize such a trip. Because no authorization, written or otherwise, was made prior to Mr. Galloway's househunting trip, there is no basis upon which reimbursement for the expense of such a trip may be authorized. B-185532, September 21, 1976.

Accordingly, the voucher may not be certified for payment.

  
Deputy Comptroller General  
of the United States